

Statement of Rhonda Ploof
Appropriations Committee Hearing
February 23, 2017

My name is Rhonda Ploof and I am a resident of Norwich and a DMHAS client. I became homeless for three years after leaving a domestic violence shelter. I was accepted into supportive housing at Bethsaida apartments. One of the requirements for residents was to perform 20 hours of community service per week. Eventually during my time living there, the combination of my worsening physical problems and my mental illness left me unable to do the community service. My condition worsened and I wasn't able to continue to do the work that they wanted me to do. I explained this to them and my doctor wrote a letter saying I could not work but the housing manager said it wasn't good enough. They refused to accommodate my disability. I didn't know it at the time, but this is illegal under federal law. All I knew was that Bethsaida served me with eviction papers because of my inability to continue performing community service, even though I explained why and provided proof.

Nobody wants to be mentally ill or disabled. I did not ask for this, but yet, I was somehow going to be punished for it. I was terrified. I had absolutely nowhere to go if I lost my apartment.

CLRP took legal action on my behalf. They sued Bethsaida for violations of state and federal fair housing laws and prevented my eviction. If it wasn't for CLRP I would be homeless again. I did not have any way to afford to hire a private lawyer and without CLRP, Bethsaida's discrimination would have gone unaddressed. CLRP has changed my life for the better. With the settlement money from my discrimination case against Bethsaida, I was able to buy a used car, and this has allowed me to attend my doctor's appointments more regularly and to have greater independence in the community.

Now that I have a roof over my head, I can put my energy toward staying engaged in treatment and remaining in the community, instead of having to worry about finding a safe place to sleep or my next meal. It helped me to find stability, safety and comfort. It also saved me from possible trouble with the law because now I have a place that's my own, and I am not trespassing or having to resort to shoplifting the way many good people are forced to when they are homeless. Homelessness robs you of your choice to make good decisions and be a good citizen- it leaves you feeling hopeless, helpless, and without any real options. In the past, when I have had to struggle with homelessness, I have relapsed into alcohol abuse to try to feel warm and to get rid of the hunger pangs in my stomach. Since getting safe housing, I have been largely successful in maintaining my sobriety for years now.

I am extremely upset, furious, and disappointed about how our Governor says he wants to end homelessness on the one hand, and then turns around and cuts CLRP's housing advocacy budget at the same time. Please don't take the funding away from CLRP. It is only going to make things worse for those of us who this state claims to be protecting. Please let CLRP continue to help others like they have helped me to have a better way of life.

Thank you.